

CHAIRWOMAN LAURA RICHARDSON (D-CA)
OPENING STATEMENT, as prepared

Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response
Committee on Homeland Security

“Emergency Logistics Management: Transforming the Delivery of Disaster Relief for the 21st Century”

September 29, 2010 at 10:00 AM
311 Cannon House Office Building

Today, we will be discussing FEMA’s efforts to transition to a 21st Century logistics system that would incorporate modern efficiencies without sacrificing effective service.

We will also learn more about how charities and other NGOs partner with FEMA to distribute donated goods and services.

Hurricane Katrina exposed the serious flaws in FEMA’s logistics systems, but as the 2006 Senate Report on Katrina concluded, “FEMA’s logistics failure during the Katrina crisis was no surprise.”

The systematic failures that occurred roughly five years ago resulted from:

- Antiquated logistics systems;
- Poor planning for transportation;
- Staffing shortages; and the
- Lack of a tracking system.

After Hurricane Katrina, Congress provided a clear mandate for a new logistics system in the Post Katrina Act: develop an efficient, transparent, and flexible logistics system for procurement and delivery of goods and services and for real-time visibility of items at each point throughout the logistics system.

We are here today to determine what type of progress FEMA has made in meeting this mandate.

In 2005, FEMA began the process of transforming its logistics management by implementing a new IT system called the Total Asset Visibility (TAV) program.

This system, now called the Logistics Supply Chain Management System, is supposed to deliver better performance and accountability by providing end-to-end transit visibility of critical assets and commodities.

With a projected cost of \$321 million dollars, however, we must make sure the system delivers what FEMA really needs and on time.

This Committee shares the concerns raised by the DHS Office of Inspector General about the system and we look forward to hearing from Mr. Jadacki about the OIG’s findings.

We also look forward to hearing from Mr. Smith about the system and his vision for the Logistics Directorate.

We appreciate Mr. Smith's wealth of knowledge and experience, but I'm sure he recognizes that the challenges are immense.

Exactly one year ago today, September 29th 2009, a massive tsunami devastated the island of American Samoa. In a matter of minutes, people on that island lost everything – homes, belongings and loved ones.

Nearly 200 people died, 2,000 were left homeless, and another 6,000 American Samoans went without power.

As the Representative of the 37th Congressional District, my constituents were directly affected by this tragedy. As home to approximately 25% of the entire American Samoan population living in the United States, my district is home to the largest concentration of Samoans living in America.

In response to the disaster in Samoa, I traveled to American Samoa & Samoa in October 2009, to observe the extent of the devastation and to deliver relief supplies contributed by my constituents.

I also worked with Representative Eni Faleomavaega (D-AS) to coordinate efforts in sending relief supplies.

Fortunately, we saw an outpouring of support for those in need. In my district alone, roughly 60 local organizations collected over 180,000 pounds of essential items to send to victims of the tragedy.

With the help of Congressman Faleomavaega and Secretary Clinton, a cargo plane airlifted about 90,000 pounds of supplies, roughly half the collected amount, to the devastated region.

While the end result was positive, the red-tape that good people of my community had to endure just to help was astonishing.

When tragedy strikes, people want to help – it is just that simple. We must have better avenues to facilitate the generosity of the American people.

I'm looking forward to hearing from Mr. Irwin about the efforts of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster to deliver donated goods to people in need.

As our federal government looks to further rely on charities across the country for disaster relief, we must ensure that the countless volunteers and all the donated supplies are viewed as a critical part of the solution, not liabilities.

In closing, as we talk about the delivery of essential supplies to those in need by FEMA, I would be remiss if I did not talk about our own responsibility as individuals to prepare for disasters.

For example, individuals across the country can be more prepared for the next disaster by making a family emergency plan, assembling an emergency supply kit, and learning about possible threats in their area.

While National Preparedness Month 2010 is coming to a close with the end of September, our efforts to be prepared for disasters should never cease. I encourage everyone to visit FEMA's READY.GOV website to learn more about the steps you can take to prepare your family, business, and community.